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SUBJECT: POLITICAL LEADERS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO STEM VIOLENCE

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In late July in discussions with the Ambassador, leading Iraqi political figures began signaling their deep concern over the deteriorating security situation in Baghdad and began to consult across political fault lines and propose practical steps on what to do. The Prime Minister's High Commission for National Reconciliation and Dialogue convened on July 22, and other formal and ad hoc groupings are also scheduled to focus on the violence. Although there is a nascent SCIRI-IIP-Kurdish coalition, Shia and Sunni still have divergent narratives to account for the security problems. However, they both criticize MNF-I. The Shia in particular focus heavily on the "Baathists and Takfiris" as the source of Iraq's violence, suggesting that the militia phenomenon is only a natural reaction to the terrorism. The Shia Coalition has raised questions about the U.S. approach, suggesting that attention on the militias is misplaced, and expresses growing fear that their democratic victory will be stolen from them. Sunni leaders focus on problems with the Ministry of Interior forces and Shia extremists.

Talabani as Honest Broker

12. (C) President Talabani shares U.S. concerns about deteriorating security, particularly in Baghdad. He is engaged in outreach across Iraq's partisan and sectarian frontlines to promote practical measures to stem the violence. He is trying to encourage moderate Sunni clerics to play a larger role, and is promoting an unofficial coalition among Kurds, the Iraqi Islamic Party, and SCIRI to promote reconciliation. Talabani also has reported his efforts to support Prime Minister Maliki's reconciliation proposals and his willingness to make the opening remarks at the High Commission for National Dialogue and Reconciliation (HCNDR) which was held on July 22. (Since then the HCNDR has met several more times, is writing its own rules, and undertaking arrangements for larger events, such as an upcoming large meeting for tribal leaders.) He is also searching for ways to bring Moqtada, or his senior leaders, into direct dialogue with the US. At his suggestion, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih hosted a small dinner on July 18 with the Ambassador with President Talabani, IIP leader and Vice President Tariq Al Hashemi, and SCIRI leader and Vice President Adel Abdel Mahdi.

SCIRI and IIP: Seeking Answers

13. (C) At dinner on the 18th, Tariq al Hashemi reported that he had had a good meeting recently with SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim to search for ways to cooperate on controlling the violence. Although clearly both leaders are looking for ways out of the current cycle of violence, they have not yet agreed on what to do, namely because they are looking in

different direction. Al Hashemi made clear that the Ministry of Interior forces constitute the crux of the problem in Baghdad. He cited several cases in which even his concerted efforts failed to provoke MOI into responding to serious, ongoing violent incidents. In exasperated tones, he said it was easier to get President Bush on the phone than the Iraqi Interior Minister. During the Mahmoudiya massacre, he tried unsuccessfully for four hours to speak to MOI Bolani, but he was always "in meetings."

14. (C) Adel Abdel Mahdi did not dispute Al Hashemi's version, and stressed more practical measures. He said he believed the political leadership of all parties needed to do more to provide political cover for taking strong measures against militias and terrorists. He also argued for organizing neighborhood watch committees.

Shia Views

15. (C) On July 21, the Ambassador received three Shia political figures from the Shia Coalition: Sheikh Jamal al Din Al Sagheer (SCIRI), Dr. Haider Abbadi (Dawa), and Hadi Al Amri (Badr). He expressed his concern about deteriorating security in Baghdad and saw a need to get Iraq's political leadership working together. Shaykh Jamal said he thought there were a lot of areas where they should talk to the US to seek agreement, and many detailed discussions should occur. He thought that more meetings would be needed. He said that he believed when the US and the Shia worked together, they were very strong, but a feeling among the marja'iyah and the street was developing that the US was changing its views of the Shia. He said he did not agree or disagree with this

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view, but found it dangerous. The Shia fear that tens of thousands died in their "jihad" for democracy and they fear its loss.

16. (C) Haider Abbadi defined the "real problem" as Baathist and Takfiri-inspired terrorism, which has unfortunately been adopted by some of the Sunni who believe "their" government was stolen from them. Sadly, this has now placed Shia and Sunni "at war" with each other. The Shia cannot be protected from the VBIEDs, and the Sunni leadership has not tried to reassure the Shia publicly. The Shia feel let down and without protection, and now that there is so much talk about disarming Shia civilians--it creates misunderstanding. Shia and Sunni forces need to be balanced. (NOTE: Baghdad is 70% Shia. END NOTE.) Tawafuq (Sunni bloc) proposed that the Sunni control Karkh, and the Shia control Rasafa (west and east sides of the Tigris), which Abbadi rejected. Baghdad must remain united. He said that the Shia Alliance wants to disarm the militias, but cannot do so until the level of violence declines. He felt that MNF-I was not taking responsibility for the situation. Acknowledging that the CF could not take sides between the groups, he argued that more could be done to control the entry and exit points to the city.

17. (C) Hadi Al Amri recalled the feeling of tension among the Shia after the Karbala explosion, when people questioned the marja'iyah's advice to be patient and many feared uncontrollable violence from the Shia. Now, he insisted, the situation was worse--he believed that many extreme acts of violence were occurring because the CF were passing control to the ISF. Were the Iraqi forces ready or not? He cited many areas of Baghdad that were virtual seas of terrorists, but the MNF-I was conducting raids to disarm civilians. He agreed that civilians should not be armed but that they needed them for protection until the ISF are ready. Iraqi Shia were "in the same trench with you" against the terrorists. He too claimed that terrorism in Iraq was caused by ex-forces of Saddam Hussein and the Takfiris, but that three months ago the problem suddenly became the militias.

The terrorists were also killing Kurds and Christians, but the Shia were bearing the brunt of the violence. He realized that the Shia reactions were creating sectarian battlelines which must be stopped.

18. (C) Al Amri proposed some practical steps. (1) Reinforce the government and rebuild the armed forces. (2) Do not stop the campaign against terrorists--there must be political reconciliation, but force must also be used; he referred to recent meetings between the Shia and Sunni Coalitions. (3) He recommended "popular committees" to be formed in every community: Shia in predominantly Shia communities; Sunnis in Sunni communities, and mixed committees where the populations are evenly divided. These committees could work with ISF and MNF-I to assure that they remained under the control of the government. (4) Rebuild in safe areas of Iraq, not just in Kurdistan. Many communities were secure, such as in Karbala, Muthanna, Najaf, and Samarra. They need encouragement in the form of investment.

19. (C) Sheikh Jamal al Din offered the closing observation, warning that the problem could grow. He was seeing the growth in anti-American feeling among the Shia, which could have negative affects on international and regional issues. He cited Lebanon as a problem, and noted that there could be local reactions to U.S. forces. Dr. Haider stressed the importance of addressing the economic problems of Iraqis, particularly in the safe areas. He said unemployment in Sadr City contributed to terrorist actions.
KHALILZAD